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DEPT FOR EUR/CARC AND INR/B

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: A WINDOW INTO PRESIDENT ALIYEV'S DACHA

Classified By: Charge Donald Lu for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) While visiting Baku June 17-19 for the GUAM summit, EUR DAS David Kramer attended a luncheon hosted by President Aliyev at his beach-front dacha in a Baku suburb. Aliyev hosted the luncheon for GUAM summit delegation heads, including the presidents from Georgia (and his wife) and Ukraine, the Prime Minister from Moldova, and summit observers (DAS Kramer, Lithuanian President Adamkus, the Bulgarian Vice President, and Estonian and Latvian Representatives, as well as the GUAM Secretary Chechelashvili). DAS Kramer's attendance and observations at this event provided an interesting optic into President Aliyev's role as host.

¶2. (C) A luxurious bus rushed Kramer and party attendees from downtown Baku to Aliyev's dacha in the northern Baku suburb of Mardakan. (NOTE: This presidential dacha was built by former President Heydar Aliyev in 1981 and was renovated this year. Current President Aliyev was clearly proud of the accommodations, describing it for his guests. The local taxi-driver rumor mill asserts that Ilham Aliyev is very popular among local residents in Mardakan. Prior to assuming the presidency and while conducting business in Russia, Ilham reportedly assisted many local Mardakan businessmen in establishing their business interests in Russia. One driver told us that Ilham sometimes drives himself in Mardakan -- with limited or no security -- because of his positive reputation among local Mardakan residents. END NOTE.) The bus was decked out with individual TV monitors and plush seats, and sped toward the Presidential dacha through roads that were completely cleared of vehicle traffic.

¶3. (C) Guests were greeted by President Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva, and a nearly four-hour feast ensued. Guests were treated to multiple courses, with plenty of caviar, sturgeon, and wine, interspersed with frequent vodka/wine toasts. The dacha was extravagant and overwhelming in terms of its decor and size. For example, there were several underground saunas and an enormous indoor swimming pool. An indoor fountain and gold trimming throughout underscored the extravagance of the dacha. The decor was abruptly modern (and reportedly had been redecorated by the same French designer currently renovating the Presidential Apparatus). The view of the Caspian was stunning. President Aliyev and Mehriban Aliyeva appeared comfortable and in their element, appearing to relish the opportunity to impress their guests. Following the sumptuous lunch, guests were bussed to a "tearoom," where guests were offered much more than tea. There was another enormous swimming pool, this one outside, and plenty of desserts and drink.

¶4. (C) Both Lithuanian President Adamkus and his wife confided to Kramer their discomfort (which Kramer completely shared) with the ostentatious display and opulence. "I would be thrown out of office if I had something like this in Vilnius," Adamkus whispered to Kramer. There appeared to be an eerie sense of disconnect between President Aliyev's personal, private residence and the socioeconomic conditions for average Baku residents.

Comment

¶5. (C) The above description is only one anecdotal window into Aliyev's personal life, but it rings true based on other reports of Aliyev's abundant wealth. It is unclear whether Aliyev understands or is concerned with the sharp contrast between his life and that of average Azerbaijani citizens, many of whom are struggling with the macroeconomic effects of Azerbaijan's growing energy income.

¶6. (U) DAS Kramer cleared this message.

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